

CÔTE D'IVOIRE'S COMEBACK: THE REVIVAL OF IVORIAN REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, Côte d'Ivoire has been a passive and often problematic actor within its region. This has been the case since the death of the first president of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, on 7 December 1993. Under Houphouët-Boigny the country encouraged migration by opening up its borders to neighbouring countries and actively linking France to the region. However, after his death the country fell into a cycle of crises characterised by political and economic instability as a result of coups d'état and civil war. This saw the country's influence decline in West Africa and beyond. Côte d'Ivoire's diplomacy and foreign policy is embedded in key documents such as the country's constitution, Act 2007-669 and Decree 2011-248. This is indicative of its aspirations as an influential political and economic actor in the region. Since the election of President Alassane Ouattara in 2011 Côte d'Ivoire has slowly re-emerged as a stable regional and international actor. The country has sought to improve relations with neighbouring states, focusing on the policy of 'good neighbourliness', which entails fostering regional stability and economic prosperity through dialogue. The country has re-established itself as a key player in regional forums such as ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union. On a continental level, critics had predicted that relations between Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa would sour due to former president Thabo Mbeki's support for Laurent Gbagbo, Ouattara's predecessor. However, relations between the countries have remained stable, indicating Côte d'Ivoire's commitment to strengthening its regional and international diplomacy. However, the country also needs to strengthen its governance and economy, and improve the living standard of its people while more firmly establishing itself as an influential regional, continental and international actor.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

GDP	gross domestic product
ICC	International Criminal Court
MRU	Mano River Union
OAU	Organization of African Unity
UEMOA	Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (West African Economic and Monetary Union)

INTRODUCTION

Since the death of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire's first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, on 7 December 1993, this West African state has been more of an 'object' of international diplomacy than an actor on the international scene. After three decades of exercising its diplomatic influence post-independence, the country fell into a cycle of crises that stripped it of the prominent role it had previously played on the continent.

The end of the Houphouët-Boigny period, the crisis of Ivorian national identity under Henri Konan-Bédié (1994–1999), the coup d'état led by Gen. Robert Gueï, the contested election of Laurent Gbagbo in 2000, the attempted coup d'état-turned-rebellion and the consequent partitioning of the country after 2002 all seriously weakened Ivorian diplomacy until the election of Alassane Ouattara (contested by Gbagbo and his supporters) and his taking office in 2011.

Any discussion or interrogation of Côte d'Ivoire's foreign policy or, more specifically, its regional diplomacy, only makes sense if conceived of in the framework of revival. 'Revival' because Côte d'Ivoire had experienced a golden age as a power on the African scene owing to its own capacities and the influence of Houphouët-Boigny. It has been and remains, in large measure, an important actor in West Africa. This study of Côte d'Ivoire's regional diplomacy, particularly under the presidency of Ouattara, provides an analysis of its current ambitions and the means by which the Ivorian government aims to achieve its foreign policy and regional integration objectives.

Before discussing and defining the concepts and usages surrounding regional diplomacy, it is important to mention that despite the distinction between foreign policy (goals, positions, strategic choices, policy clusters) and diplomacy (craft, techniques, institutions, rules, bodies) the paper is positioned on the fine line that separates the two. Here the term 'regional diplomacy' simultaneously designates matters of policy, policymakers and diplomacy, as well as the foreign relations of the state, considered as a regional power and a leading nation.

The concept of regional diplomacy can be defined in two ways. Firstly, it can refer to the foreign policy of a state in relation to a given geographical region. Thus we may speak of France's African policy or of the policy of the US towards the Middle East. This alludes to the diplomatic influence that these states exert in these regions, the actions they implement and the regulatory role they play or wish to play. Foreign policy itself is the 'instrument with which the state attempts to fashion its international political environment',¹ as well as all the activities relevant to the foreign undertakings of the state and co-ordinated by its ministry of foreign affairs or foreign relations. Secondly, regional diplomacy can be defined as foreign policy focused on the geographic region of which the state in question forms part, that is to say its neighbours and the political subregion in which it engages in a process of integration or simple inter-governmental co-operation.

1 Charillon F (ed.), *Politique Étrangère. Nouveaux Regards*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 2002.

In the framework of the second definition, the regional diplomacy of Côte d'Ivoire can be conceived of as policy enacted in five areas:

- its bilateral relations vis-à-vis its five neighbours (Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana);
- its role in intergovernmental co-operation organisations, namely the Conseil de l'Entente and the Mano River Union (MRU);
- its role in sub-regional integration organisations such as the Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (the West African Economic and Monetary Union, or UEMOA) and ECOWAS, as well as continental bodies such as the AU;
- its relations with other regional powers, for example Nigeria or, further afield, South Africa; and
- its interactions with global powers (notably France and the US) and emerging powers (most notably China) and their effects on subregional relations.

Furthermore, this paper focuses on the regional agenda of Côte d'Ivoire not only in terms of the objectives of the Ivorian government related to its foreign policy but also in terms of recent trends in its diplomacy – in line with regional objectives – as well as its institutional capacities, its intervention methods, the advantages it enjoys and the disadvantages from which it suffers in its regional and international engagements.

THE LEGACY OF FELIX HOUPHOUËT-BOIGNY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE REGIONAL DIPLOMACY OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Côte d'Ivoire is situated in West Africa, bordered by Mali and Burkina Faso to the north, Liberia and Guinea to the west and Ghana to the east. It has a surface area of 322 463 km² and a population of 22.7 million people,² a large proportion of which consists of immigrants,³ notably from neighbouring countries. The main export commodities of the country are cacao, coffee and oil. Its gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 8.7% in 2013; the country achieved 9% growth in 2015 and was expected to maintain similar growth rates over the next two years.⁴ It is governed by a multiparty democracy that is in the process of reconstruction.

Under the presidency of Houphouët-Boigny, after independence in 1960, Côte d'Ivoire's foreign policy was characterised by two major factors. The first concerned migration: the government opened the country to immigration in order to bolster the workforce and turn the country into a major regional agricultural and industrial centre. And immigration was

2 World Bank, 'Côte d'Ivoire', <http://data.worldbank.org/country/cote-divoire?view=chart>, accessed 15 October 2016.

3 Up to 26% in 1998, according to Francis Akindes. See Akindes F, 'Racines des crises socio-politiques en Côte d'Ivoire et sens de l'histoire', in Ouedraogo J-B & E Sall, *Frontières de la Citoyenneté et Violence Politique en Côte d'Ivoire*. Dakar: CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa), 2008. The General Census of the Population and Habitat undertaken in 2014 provides more up-to-date data.

4 World Bank, *op. cit.*

not limited to these areas; Côte d'Ivoire was opened to West African immigrants in all fields, including government. The second was its strong activism on the African continent and its close ties with France. Houphouët-Boigny is credited with coining the expression 'Françafrique', which refers to the particular nature of the relations tying Côte d'Ivoire to its former colonial power.

To an observer of post-independence Côte d'Ivoire, the economic objectives that defined Houphouët-Boigny's foreign policy were a good strategy in the short and medium term, but presented significant risks in the long term. Several decades after independence Côte d'Ivoire, although economically strong, 'was still incapable of establishing a security plan countering external threats and – more significantly – internal threats, congruent with the size of its economy'.⁵

From a historical perspective, the country's regional diplomacy remains tied to the construction of its identity as a member of the community of nations. A small survey of Ivorians at home and abroad⁶ reveals that most attach importance to the notion of 'Côte d'Ivoire as a country of peace and tolerance; a haven of prosperity which promotes in Africa and in the wider world peace and fellowship between different peoples'. It is therefore fitting that the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, jointly offered by the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Foundation and UNESCO (since the Resolution of the 25th session of the General Assembly of UNESCO in 1989) is awarded to individuals or bodies 'promoting peace'.

Houphouët-Boigny, with his knowledge of Africa and his connections to global decision-makers, exerted real influence over the course of political events. He managed this despite never presiding over a regional or subregional institution such as ECOWAS or the former Organization of African Unity (OAU), although he did manage the ministerial portfolio of foreign affairs between 3 January 1961 and 10 September 1963. This influence was put to use in promoting dialogue in various situations.

On 4 November 1970 Houphouët-Boigny became the first African head of state to advocate talks with the apartheid regime in South Africa. This policy of reconciliation would lead to a historic meeting between him and then South African prime minister John Vorster. In 1991 the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize was jointly awarded to Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk (two years before they were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize in 1993). This event saw the two South African leaders shaking hands for the first time on an international platform.

Under the leadership of Houphouët-Boigny Côte d'Ivoire's activities in Africa favoured peace, although there were some exceptions. Guinea's Ahmed Sékou Touré labelled Houphouët-Boigny 'France's man in Africa' because of his support for the 'no' vote in the French constitutional referendum of 1958 (which gave France's African territories the

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5 Anonymous interview with a senior official in the Côte d'Ivoire army.

6 Telephone and instant messenger interviews conducted in June 2014 with a sample of between 10 and 20 Ivorian subjects.

choice of either supporting French constitutional reform or proclaiming independence). There was also friction between him and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, a proponent of a pan-Africanist vision for Africa to which Houphouët-Boigny was vehemently opposed. He was implicated in a conspiracy against the Marxist-Leninist regime in Benin in 1977 and the assassination of Thomas Sankara⁷ in 1987, both of which were linked to the Ivorian government. Added to this was the support Côte d'Ivoire offered to the Biafra secessionists in Nigeria by officially recognising the Biafra regime on 14 May 1968 and allowing the visit of Gen. Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, the then leader of Biafra, to Côte d'Ivoire. This resulted in the cutting of diplomatic ties between Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire in January 1970 (re-established in 1971). Côte d'Ivoire also supported the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola in the Angolan civil war, as a result of which Côte d'Ivoire was considered an enemy of the state by Luanda.

The foreign policy and, specifically, the African policy of Côte d'Ivoire was shaped by the 'wise old man' Houphouët-Boigny. The ideals and the positions he defended continue to underlie Ivorian diplomacy. His symbolic legacy lends weight to Côte d'Ivoire's ambitions and remains a point of reference in the political and diplomatic imagery of the country.

Roosens and Bento Beja⁸ describe three levels in the hierarchy of foreign policy objectives. At the top of the pyramid are 'eternal objectives', which are here understood to refer to Houphouët-Boigny's legacy. This is despite the fact that some of the policy decisions he implemented can be considered as having had dire consequences for the country.

Critics of his legacy believe that his foreign policy decisions in the long run led to the serious internal problems that the country has experienced. The country's close ties to France and its pro-immigration policy with regard to West African countries may have contributed to the emergence of Ivorian nationalism. These factors, among others, caused the 10-year political crisis and the armed conflict after the end of Bédié's presidency in 1993. Bédié was the successor and a pale imitator of Houphouët-Boigny, and his rule was marked by political repression and massive corruption.

The presidency of Gueï, whose coup of 24 December 1999 had brought an end to Bédié's rule, was not significant on the global stage because of the international boycott and isolation the regime faced. Gbagbo's presidency then led to various splits without his achieving the same success as the charismatic Houphouët-Boigny. Under Gbagbo there was friction with certain neighbouring states and tensions with France, while the country forged closer ties with African powers such as South Africa and Angola as well as conservative Protestant and Evangelical political groups in the US.

7 Thomas Sankara (21 December 1949 – 15 October 1987) was the Marxist revolutionary president of Burkina Faso from 1983–1987. While enjoying widespread support in Burkina Faso for his progressive social and economic reforms, his revolutionary rhetoric was unpopular with France, the vested middle class and Houphouët-Boigny's Côte d'Ivoire. He was overthrown and assassinated in a coup d'état led by Blaise Compaoré on 15 October 1987.

8 Roosens C & J Bento Beja, 'Définition et repères', in Roosens C, Rosoux V & T De Wilde D'estmael, *La Politique Étrangère. Le Modèle Classique à L'épreuve*. Brussels: PIE Peter Lang, 2004.

The Gbagbo period (2000–2011) saw Côte d'Ivoire's role on the African continent and internationally diminish further. This was because of the various crises experienced by the country, such as the army mutiny in 2002 that led to the first Ivorian civil war (2002–2007) and the 2010–11 Ivorian crisis in the aftermath of the disputed 2010 elections. The country was increasingly confined to a passive role (an object rather than the subject of foreign policy), although its significant economic weight within UEOMA (it is responsible for between 35% and 40% of the zone's GDP)⁹ meant that even during the crisis the country still influenced the decisions and directions of the organisation.

This analysis aims to evaluate to what extent this political and diplomatic legacy persists, and whether it is being revived or rejected in the contemporary foreign policy of Côte d'Ivoire.

GRAND AMBITIONS, MODEST MEANS

The institutional organisation of Ivorian diplomacy is based on three legal texts: the constitution of 23 July 2000, which establishes the separation of powers between the president and the National Assembly in terms of foreign policy; Act 2007-669 of 27 September 2007, which defines the statute of the diplomatic corps;¹⁰ and Decree 2011-468 of 21 December 2011, which establishes the implementation modalities of the above-mentioned act as well as the decrees governing the organisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ministry charged with African integration and Ivorians abroad.

The Ivorian constitution (like most other constitutions) confers significant powers on the head of state in terms of the elaboration and implementation of the country's foreign policy. Article 34 states that '[t]he President of the Republic is the Head of State ... [and] the guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity, [and] respect for international engagements'.¹¹ Article 84 further specifies the jurisdiction of the head of the executive: 'The President of the Republic negotiates and ratifies international agreements and treaties.'¹²

Article 71 specifies the matters that fall under the domain of the law, such as the statute of the diplomatic corps and the organisation of the national defence force. The Ivorian constitution inherently favours regional integration, as stated in Article 122: 'The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire may sign association agreements with other states. It accepts the creation along with those states of intergovernmental institutions of communal management, co-ordination and free co-operation.'¹³ Article 123 specifies the potential purposes of these groupings, namely 'the harmonisation of monetary, economic and financial policy;

9 Central Bank of West African States, 'Statistical Year Book 2014', June 2015, Dakar, p. 4.

10 'Diplomatic corps' refers here to the body of diplomats as opposed to the ensemble of foreign diplomats accredited by a given state.

11 Constitute Project, 'Côte d'Ivoire 2000 (rev. 2004)', https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Cote_DIvoire_2004?lang=en#90, accessed 26 October 2016.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

Along with Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and its Parliament are pioneers in the practice of the foreign affairs commission's initiating inquiries and holding plenary votes on issues of foreign affairs

the establishment of customs unions; the creation of solidarity funds; the harmonisation of development plans; the harmonisation of foreign policy; [and] the placing in common use of the means to ensure national defence'.¹⁴

In most African states the National Assembly and, in particular, its foreign affairs committee limit themselves to considering and voting on the authorisation and ratification of agreements already negotiated by the government without exercising their right to legislative initiative and parliamentary control. This is as a result of foreign policy and defence being seen as the privileged domain of the relevant head of state. However, along with Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and its Parliament are pioneers in the practice of the foreign affairs commission's initiating inquiries and holding plenary votes on issues of foreign affairs. For example, in July 2014 the Parliament ratified an act relating to an accord signed in Paris on 26 January 2012 initiating a defence partnership between Côte d'Ivoire and France. This is in contrast with the situation in Cameroon and Togo (for example) where the same accords were signed without legislative ratification and simply ratified by the head of state.

The statute of the diplomatic corps of Côte d'Ivoire holds a particular status within the Ivorian public service. It defines the procedure of accessing the corps, career progression within the corps and the rights and obligations of diplomats. While it was adopted in 2007 it only entered into force in 2011 by means of an implementation decree. It sets out four categories of corps members: ambassadors (10% of the total), plenipotentiary ministers (20%), foreign affairs advisors (30%) and foreign affairs secretaries (40%).

In addition, two central administrations are involved in the implementation of the regional diplomacy of Côte d'Ivoire: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the minister of which also often holds the position of minister of state), in terms of Decree 2011-387 of 16 November 2011, and the ministry charged with African integration, by means of Decree 2007-570 of 10 August 2007 governing the organisation of the ministry charged with African integration.

Côte d'Ivoire has 46 ambassadors, 44% of whom are deployed within Africa, according to a recent interview with an Ivorian diplomat. He confirmed that the annual budget for this service varies between XOF¹⁵ 60 and 70 billion (approximately \$102–120 million). This is a relatively modest capital outlay and ambassadorial network given the country's grand political and economic ambitions. For this reason, the government has undertaken a large-scale reform of its diplomatic network, extending its presence by opening 15 new embassies, four of which are in African countries: Benin, Botswana, Kenya and Mauritius. It is also reconfiguring its diplomatic personnel in various embassies and restructuring the Republican Force of Côte d'Ivoire with disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and security sector reform programmes supported by the UN, the EU and other bilateral partners. This aims to make the army (long neglected as a foreign policy tool) a more credible factor in the country's regional diplomacy.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Currency code for the West African CFA franc.

Finally, while Ivorian diplomats are, for the most part, graduates of Ecole Nationale d'Administration in Abidjan, the government intends to make greater use of diplomats with an economic background. In line with this, on 17 July 2014 (during the official visit of French President François Hollande to Côte d'Ivoire) a partnership accord was signed between the Ivorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales with the view to establish the Diplomatic Institute of Côte d'Ivoire. Furthermore, in order to regain or consolidate its status as a regional power, Côte d'Ivoire also plans to invest in the development of strategic thinking in Africa by equipping itself (with the support, among others, of France) with an institute for multidisciplinary research and training in issues relating to peace, security and economic development on the continent.

This illustrates that Côte d'Ivoire, after 10 years of crisis, understands what needs to be done in terms of foreign policy to regain its status as credible regional player in the eyes of African states, global powers, intergovernmental organisations, international non-governmental organisations and international public opinion.

In addition, an analysis of the steps taken in internal and foreign policy by the Ouattara government since 2011 shows that the country's revival on the international scene rests on two complementary visions.

The first consists of the measures put in place by the government to ensure the post-conflict rehabilitation of the country. These measures are enacted through the programmes of the Côte d'Ivoire Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and are based on both amnesty and the prosecution of those personally responsible for crimes committed during the post-electoral violence in 2010/2011. The idea is that if this vision of combining amnesty and sentencing succeeds, as in the case of post-apartheid South Africa, it will set an example that can be followed throughout Africa. Ivorian Prime Minister Daniel Kablan Duncan said as much at a conference in Paris in April 2013: 'It is not a case of choosing between peace and justice.'¹⁶

The second vision is to attract foreign investment into Côte d'Ivoire by means of economic diplomacy to bolster both its own economy and subregional infrastructure projects. In this regard Abidjan intends to take a regional leadership position supported by its various assets and development potential.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND ITS NEIGHBOURS: APPEASEMENT RETURNS

Defining the most advantageous relationship between a state and its immediate neighbours is fundamental to the survival of the particular state. A policy of good neighbourliness effectively safeguards a state, while a complacent foreign policy vis-à-vis neighbouring

16 Government of Côte d'Ivoire, 'Conférence à Science Po-Paris: Daniel Kablan Duncan présente les performances économiques de la Côte d'Ivoire aux étudiants', 17 April 2013, http://www.gouv.ci/_actualite-article.php?d=1&recordID=3408&p=308, accessed 15 October 2016.

countries can lead to threats to its territorial integrity. In addition, globalisation has changed and amplified the role of borders.

Martinez¹⁷ proposes a typology of borders based on the type of relationship that exists between states. He defines exclusion and alienation borders, interdependence borders and integration borders. As far as Côte d'Ivoire is concerned, borders typifying exclusion and alienation can be excluded, as its borders (like most in sub-Saharan Africa) are somewhat artificial. What then is the Ivorian policy as far as Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea and Liberia are concerned? Two aspects are analysed: political dialogue and recognised conflict situations.

The political dialogue between Côte d'Ivoire and its neighbours has been described as 'very good' by a diplomat interviewed anonymously. Several indicators also attest to this. A number of official, working and friendly visits have been made to Abidjan by the heads of neighbouring states since 2011, and Ouattara has likewise visited his counterparts several times. Côte d'Ivoire and its neighbours and their various ministries also collaborate on a number of issues, and joint co-operation commissions between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso as well as Guinea and Liberia have been reactivated.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND BURKINA FASO

The amicable relationship between Ouattara and his former Burkinabe counterpart, Blaise Compaoré, created opportunities for co-operation between the two states. However, while there is not open hostility between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, some important sources of friction do persist in their relationship. This was most notable under Gbagbo's presidency, when he accused his neighbour of acting as a base for the destabilisation of his administration.

The 2008 signing of the Friendship and Co-operation Treaty between the two countries, along with the manifest political will to accelerate the treaty's provisions, augured well for the consolidation of relations between Abidjan and Ouagadougou. Reconciliation and the political will to create momentum in regional activities have been evident since the Malian crisis of 2012.¹⁸ During this crisis the two states acted jointly as key players despite differing points of view on the interventions proposed and supported by subregional structures. At the time Ouattara was chairperson of ECOWAS and Compaoré was a mediator in the Malian crisis. (Mali is one of only two states, the other being Ghana, that share a border with both Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso). This situation is not dissimilar, although on a smaller scale, to the reconciliation between France and Germany after the Second World War that led to the realisation of an integrated Europe. Significantly, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso have convened ministerial councils based

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17 Marin A, 'Du "bon voisinage" en relations internationales. La frontière finno-russe, laboratoire et modèle de coopération en Europe', *Revue d'Études Comparatives Est-Ouest*, 1, 1, 2007.

18 The crisis in Mali was caused in January 2012 by several Islamist insurgent groups that took control of northern Mali. France and the AU intervened on 8 February 2012.

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Since a transitional government emerged after the popular uprising of October 2014 in Burkina Faso, its relations with Côte d'Ivoire have fluctuated. They tend to hover between trust and distrust, with mutual conspiracy charges that both express the interdependence of the two countries and point to Côte d'Ivoire's still fragile state by challenging its regional leadership. Burkina Faso's prosecution (despite diplomatic pressures) of Guillaume Soro, president of the Ivorian National Assembly, and Compaoré's becoming an Ivorian citizen and resident of Côte d'Ivoire are signs of the precariousness of the Ivorian-Burkinabe relationship despite various attempts to mitigate this. After Compaoré's era, the two governments organised a joint cabinet meeting in Yamoussoukro in July 2016.

Although the political dialogue between Côte d'Ivoire and neighbours is relatively good, three notable but very different sources of conflict persist. These affect Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire and its western neighbours Liberia and Guinea.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND GHANA

For many years, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have disagreed over the delineation of their maritime border. The issue relates to ownership of the Jubilee Oil Field, discovered by the Russian company OAO Lukoil and the US Vanco Energy Company operating under an exploration permit issued by Accra but contested by Abidjan. The two countries have agreed not to exploit reserves found in the contested zone (estimated at 1 billion barrels) and have implemented a joint commission to define their maritime border. This commission is yet to arrive at a mutually acceptable arrangement. As a result Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana took the dispute to the Law of the Sea Tribunal in 2014. Its ruling is expected in late 2017 and, until such time, both parties have agreed to continue to suspend exploration and exploitation in the region.¹⁹

CÔTE D'IVOIRE, GUINEA AND LIBERIA

The village of Kpéaba in Côte d'Ivoire, 15km west of the border with Guinea, is the cause of territorial conflict between these two countries that has occasionally turned violent. In order to resolve this tension peacefully and to facilitate a joint process of border delineation, the two countries agreed to withdraw their forces from the contested zone in 2013.

19 See *Mail Online*, 'Ghana, ICoast meet amid oil dispute over sea boundary', 1 June 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-3620473/Ghana-ICoast-meet-amid-oil-dispute-sea-boundary.html>, accessed 16 August 2016.

Also in the west of the country, the Liberian conflict²⁰ spilled over into Côte d'Ivoire several years ago during the presidency of Houphouët-Boigny because of a 'complex set of alliances as well as a large scale ethnic "interpenetration" between the two countries',²¹ and has evolved along with political events and security developments. It increasingly manifests in the form of armed incursions into Ivorian territory from Liberia. The two governments, with the support of UN forces (the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire and the UN Mission in Liberia), are organising a response to this situation in the form of joint patrols and manoeuvres and an agreement on the judicial extradition of individuals implicated in the armed incursions.

These localised conflicts are geographically contained and have not led to generalised violence. As a result, Ivorian policy vis-à-vis its neighbours is characterised by interdependence as a result of their numerous political and socio-economic interactions and by the return to a long-term policy of appeasement following periodic periods of tension.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION ORGANISATIONS: UEMOA, ECOWAS AND THE AU

On every continent, the regionalisation of foreign policy has become a policy solution for states and other actors in search of synergies that add value to public policies conceptualised and implemented at the level of the geographic group or sub-group.

As Charillon emphasises, 'numerous studies show a correlation between geographical proximity and the definition of national foreign policy priorities'.²² The interdependence that characterises the relations between Côte d'Ivoire and its neighbours creates a reciprocal co-dependence in the West African subregion. Equally, the desire to bring the various subregions of the continent closer has led to the formation of the now-defunct OAU and, since 2002, the AU.

This paper focuses on three institutions because of their importance (political capital, budget and international visibility) but also because, with Côte d'Ivoire at the centre, they radiate outwards concentrically. The first circle is UEMOA, the second circle is ECOWAS and the third and outermost circle is the AU.

Ivorian policy vis-à-vis its neighbours is characterised by interdependence as a result of their numerous political and socio-economic interactions and by the return to a long-term policy of appeasement

20 The Liberian conflict began in 1989 after former Liberian government minister Charles Taylor moved into Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire with his National Patriotic Front of Liberia forces to start an uprising meant to topple the government of Samuel Doe.

21 Memier M, 'La Côte d'Ivoire dans la Dynamique D'instabilité Oust-Africaine', GRIP (Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security) Analysis Note, 31 January 2013, <http://grip.org/fr/node/774>, accessed 15 October 2016.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 393.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND UEMOA

Côte d'Ivoire is a leading and active member of UEMOA, which is an economic and monetary union working towards greater regional integration and unified tariffs on external imports. Thus far the union has established a common accounting system, periodic reviews of member countries' macroeconomic policies based on convergence criteria, a regional stock exchange, and the legal and regulatory framework for a regional banking system.²³ Before it was equipped with a political mandate by its member states, notably Supplementary Act 04/2013, which instituted a communal policy in the domains of peace and security, its focus was essentially the economic integration of its eight member states.²⁴ Côte d'Ivoire's role in UEMOA therefore needs to be viewed primarily through an economic lens.

Côte d'Ivoire alone accounts for around 30% of the zone's GDP,²⁵ and 60% of UEMOA's exports originate in the country. The Community Solidarity Levy – a tax of 0.5% on the value of imports from outside UEMOA – finances approximately two-thirds of the union's budget. With imports estimated at \$11.1 billion in 2014 (almost double that of Senegal, which is in second place with an import volume of \$6.5 billion),²⁶ Côte d'Ivoire's hefty contribution to this fund guarantees it a strong position in defining the union's direction. This lends considerable weight to the country's selection of the governor of the Central Bank of West African States, the issuing authority of the union's currency. The first person Côte d'Ivoire appointed to this position was none other than Ouattara. Côte d'Ivoire's importance within UEMOA is a reflection of its economic vitality. Abidjan is also home to the Regional Securities Exchange, the communal stock exchange for the eight member states of UEMOA. In 2014, 31 of the 37 listed companies were Ivorian.²⁷

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CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND ECOWAS

Within ECOWAS²⁸ Côte d'Ivoire's bargaining power is less substantial. This is as a result of Nigeria's almost total dominance in this grouping, Senegal's raised profile during the

23 See Office of the US Trade Representative, 'West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA)', <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/regional-economic-communities-rec/west-african-economic-and-monetary-union-uemoa>, accessed 16 August 2016.

24 The UEMOA members are Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

25 UNECA (UN Economic Commission for Africa) Regional Office, 'Rapport sur la situation économique et sociale en Afrique de l'Ouest en 2011–2012 et perspectives pour 2013'.

26 See ITC TradeMap, <http://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>, accessed 2 November 2016.

27 Bourse Régionale des Valeurs Mobilières, *Rapport annuel 2013*.

28 ECOWAS is a regional group of 15 West African countries. Founded on 28 May 1975, the organisation seeks to promote economic integration across the region. Its members are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Mauritania withdrew as a member in 2000. See ECOWAS, 'About ECOWAS', <http://www.ecowas.int/about-ecowas/basic-information/>, accessed 17 September 2016.

decade of conflict in Côte d'Ivoire and, above all, the role played by Burkina Faso. While a modest economic power, Burkina Faso relies on the networks established by Compaoré, the oldest head of state in West Africa who was often mandated as mediator in regional conflicts. In this context, Ouattara's election to the presidency of ECOWAS at the 40th summit of the organisation in 2012 sounded the country's return to the arena.

During his chairmanship – from 2012–2014 – ECOWAS initiated internal reorganisation by increasing the number of commissioners from nine to 15 (one per member state) and by restructuring the commission and consolidating its staff.

In 2012 ECOWAS was also shaken by the serious political and security crises in Mali and Guinea-Bissau.²⁹ Despite limited means, ECOWAS managed to confine these crises with the help of its bilateral and multilateral partners. Côte d'Ivoire, despite its post-conflict priority of restructuring its armed forces, deployed a contingent of 126 troops as part of the UN Mission to Mali, which took over from the African-led International Support Mission to Mali composed of ECOWAS and Chadian troops. In addition, under the same Ivorian mandate ECOWAS adopted a common external tariff, which is meant to come into effect by January 2017 after nine years of negotiations. Further indicating the economic bent of its regional diplomacy, the Ivorian chairmanship of ECOWAS reactivated the project to construct a Lagos–Abidjan motorway and concluded the negotiation of a regional economic partnership agreement with the EU. It is the first regional economic community in Africa to reach such an agreement.

In sum, the Ivorian tenure of ECOWAS can be seen as a sign of the trust expressed by the other member states in the country and its president. Ouattara has succeeded in bringing greater international visibility to the group and has bolstered the vision of regional integration through reconciliation, infrastructure development, increased regional trade (weak elsewhere in Africa) and the free circulation of people and goods. All of these are qualitative and quantitative indicators of Côte d'Ivoire's commitment to regional integration.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND THE AU

At the level of the AU, Côte d'Ivoire's participation is the same as that of every other member state. It has permanent representation in Addis Ababa that maintains the link between the AU Commission and the Ivorian government.

Côte d'Ivoire was a founding member of the OAU and played a determining role in the mediation initiatives carried out by the organisation. Ivorian diplomat Amara Essy (minister of foreign affairs in Côte d'Ivoire from 1990–2000) was the last secretary general of the OAU. He was instrumental in the political and organisational reforms that led to

29 The crisis in Guinea-Bissau, which was caused by a coup by elements of the national armed forces two weeks before the second round of a presidential election, led to fears of violence and civil war. International pressure soon led to the election of Manuel Serifo Nhamadjo as interim president on 15 April 2012.

the creation of the AU and acted as interim chairperson of the AU Commission until the election of Alpha Oumar Konaré in 2003.

Interestingly, Côte d'Ivoire's position on the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) differs markedly from the attitude held in the main by AU members, which have tended to criticise, if not vilify, the ICC for its pursuit of African leaders.

Most AU member states accuse the ICC of bias, except for Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi and Côte d'Ivoire, which, for different reasons, support the jurisdiction of the ICC and its mandate of punishing war crimes and crimes against humanity. Despite its taking a minority position on this sensitive issue, which could prejudice the political interests of the country, Côte d'Ivoire's risk of marginalisation and isolation seems remote.

If, like Côte d'Ivoire, the member states of UEMOA, ECOWAS and the AU implemented organisational policies aimed at creating integrated, aligned, stable and prosperous regional spaces and other so-called inter-governmental co-operation programmes, they could collaborate in specific domains or in a group of sectors, putting their resources to common use to realise common objectives.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND REGIONAL CO-OPERATION ORGANISATIONS: THE CONSEIL DE L'ENTENTE AND THE MANO RIVER UNION

Côte d'Ivoire, like most West African states, also belongs to a number of inter-governmental co-operation organisations. This paper focuses on the Conseil de l'Entente (Council of Accord) and the MRU.

CONSEIL DE L'ENTENTE

The Conseil de l'Entente is the oldest intergovernmental co-operation organisation in West Africa. It was created in the context of the rivalry between Léopold Sédar Senghor, the former president of Senegal, and Houphouët-Boigny. On the eve of Senegal's independence Senghor wished to develop a West African federation, a loose political project to bring together francophone West African states after their independence. Without achieving this completely, in January 1959 he did succeed in establishing the Federation of Mali, consisting of Dahomey (present-day Benin), Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso), Senegal and French Sudan (present-day Mali). Houphouët-Boigny realised that Côte d'Ivoire had been marginalised and he was not prepared to hand over leadership of the region to Senghor. As noted by Pompey,³⁰ 'he torpedoed the federation by creating, four months later, the Conseil de l'Entente, which grouped his country with Niger, Dahomey and Upper Volta'. In 1966 Togo also joined the council.

30 Pompey F, 'Côte d'Ivoire: Houphouët-Boigny en majesté', *Jeune Afrique*, hors-série Spécial Côte d'Ivoire, 2010.

Thanks to its flourishing economy Côte d'Ivoire was able to dominate the group. In return for the financial support that he offered his allies, the Ivorian president obtained their allegiance in policy decisions. The Solidarity Fund was implemented by the five member states but 70% of the resources of the fund came from Côte d'Ivoire. This allowed the financing of various development projects through loans made to member states at low interest rates. The Conseil de l'Entente functioned as a mechanism for Ivorian diplomatic clientelism in the region and as a strategic resource for the country's interests, even though Houphouët-Boigny always emphasised the solidarity of the organisation, comparing the five members to the five fingers of a hand.

The Conseil de l'Entente did not survive the passing of its founder. It suffered a long period of decline until the 2009 summit held at Yamoussoukro and organised by Gbagbo. It was only in 2011 that a summit was held in Cotonou to relaunch the institution, reactivate its Executive Secretariat in Abidjan and nominate an executive secretary, the Ivorian Patrice Kouamé.

Since then the organisation has initiated the Abidjan–Ouagadougou–Niamey–Cotonou–Lomé railway link integration project (which was around 60% complete on the Niamey–Dosso stretch at the time of writing).³¹ This project consists of a strategic plan based on three pillars: the reinforcement of political co-operation for peace and security; the development of large-scale infrastructure projects to facilitate connections; and the bolstering of trade among member states.

MANO RIVER UNION

While the Conseil de l'Entente was initiated by Côte d'Ivoire, in 2008 the country was the last to join the MRU, which has existed since 1973 and was started by Sierra Leone and Liberia, with Guinea joining in 1980.

Côte d'Ivoire also plays a leadership role within this organisation given its economic power and sizeable population. Because of the serious political and security crises the MRU's member states have experienced in the recent past, the principal aim of the organisation is ensuring regional stability. A strategy of strengthening trans-border security has thus been adopted by the union to consolidate peace and security in the region, thereby safeguarding investments and ensuring wealth creation and poverty reduction.

As part of this focus on political and economic development, the MRU has adopted a regional youth employment scheme centred on the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Polytechnic in Yamoussoukro, with the view to train young people to realise the economic objectives of the union. However, these objectives may see limited implementation due to the diverse

31 See *Agence Ecofin*, 'Bolloré signs construction and operation agreements for the Niamey-Cotonou railway', 18 August 2015, <http://www.agenceecofin.com/finance-uk/1808-31425-bollore-signs-construction-and-operation-agreements-for-the-niamey-cotonou-railway>, 15 October 2016.

natures of the various member states and the fact that no two member states share a currency.

It is thus necessary to interrogate the role played by Côte d'Ivoire in the various regional organisations, and its position regarding the rationalisation of the competencies and resources of these regional organisations (which ultimately all have similar mandates) and the creation of a single currency zone for ECOWAS.

Like other West African capitals, Abidjan hopes to establish a consultation mechanism between the various regional organisations with the ultimate goal of merging them and creating a single currency. This ambition is in step with current practices, namely the reactivation of moribund organisations, the creation of new umbrella organisations, and the extension of the mandates of existing organisations.³² But what is the end goal? To ensure integration? To exploit historical legitimacy? To limit the influence of Nigeria?

Abidjan hopes to establish a consultation mechanism between the various regional organisations with the ultimate goal of merging them and creating a single currency

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND ITS POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Following the end of the Second World War in 1945 international relations were characterised by bipolarity (ie. the Cold War), and African countries were (or are) drawn into that configuration to a greater or lesser extent. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the international political system saw the rise of the overall dominance of the US and the promotion of liberal democracy as the only means to attain global stability. Here too Africa remained at the centre of what Huntington calls 'the third wave of democratisation', which began in 1974 with the fall of the regimes in Southern Europe and the subsequent democratisation of Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa.³³ There was, however, growing resistance to this 'unipolarity' (which in fact never fully existed). Since, at least, the attacks of 11 September 2001 this unipolar world has ceded to a multipolar reality. Now multiple states or groups of states constitute major actors along with non-state entities that are capable of influencing international relations at low cost. Africa is acting dynamically and opportunistically within this system, with the expected emergence of an 'apolar' or 'anti-polar' system to which it will have to adapt.

Ivorian diplomacy, fully conscious of the transformation of the international scene, is adjusting its positions and strategic interests based on the turbulence that characterises its regional environment and the changes in global power relations.

In West Africa, relations between Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, the largest regional power, are collegial. The two countries are the lead states in ECOWAS, although Senegal, Burkina Faso and Ghana can, in certain circumstances, play equally important roles. Nonetheless,

32 Loko M, 'Coopération et intégration régionales en Afrique de l'ouest: analyse du cadre de rationalisation de l'architecture institutionnelle', Masters dissertation, ENA-France (Ecole Nationale d'Administration – France), Strasbourg, 2014.

33 Some scholars like Renske Doorenspleet prefer to talk of a fourth wave, and still others consider the Arab Spring as a fourth or fifth wave respectively.

The participation of Ouattara (at the invitation of the South African government) at the 2013 BRICS Summit organised by South Africa is indicative of the renewed interest by the two governments to play a joint role on the African scene and among emerging nations

Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria are considered the de facto leaders of the francophone and anglophone spheres respectively. Ouattara paid a state visit to Nigeria in 2012 and then Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan visited Abidjan the same year. The first session of the grand joint co-operation commission between Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria was held in June 2013 in Abuja. The then Nigerian vice-president Mohammed Namadi Sambo and Duncan made use of this special relationship to work together on the completion of joint projects. In addition, Nigeria is Côte d'Ivoire's major source of imports, larger than both France and China. The two states are both particularly engaged in the construction of the Abidjan–Lagos highway, which is being led by ECOWAS.

On the continental level, relations with the other leading African state, South Africa, are relatively good. This is despite a number of observers' fearing the opposite given that Pretoria (notably under Mbeki) was a strong supporter of Gbagbo in the standoff between him and Ouattara during the 2012 election. Relations with South Africa have normalised, with Abidjan and Pretoria hoping to take advantage of this cordiality to promote co-operative projects in the economic and commercial domain. An agreement on the creation of a bilateral joint co-operation commission between the two states was signed on 4 December 2015 by South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and then Ivorian foreign minister Charles Koffi Diby. Zuma and Ouattara witnessed the signing. This commission will allow the two states to raise their level of co-operation in line with their joint ambitions. The participation of Ouattara (at the invitation of the South African government) at the 2013 BRICS Summit organised by South Africa is indicative of the renewed interest by the two governments to play a joint role on the African scene and among emerging nations, a grouping Côte d'Ivoire hopes to join by 2020.

Côte d'Ivoire's relations with global powers also have a direct impact on its regional context.

It remains a faithful ally of France and maintains good relations with the country both politically and economically. France is the second largest source of imports to Côte d'Ivoire, and over 140 branches of large French companies and 400 French small and medium enterprises operate in the country.³⁴

In the security domain, after Operation Unicorn, French forces remained in Côte d'Ivoire until 1 January 2015. Operating from their advance base at Port-Bouët, they sought to conduct counter-terrorism operations, combat cross-border organised crime, and serve as a logistic relay for potential conflicts in the region.

The US, the primary importer of Ivorian goods in 2013, also maintains good relations with Côte d'Ivoire in both political and economic terms. This is also the case with China, which is the third largest exporter of goods to Côte d'Ivoire. Abidjan, with its relatively francophile president, has diversified its economic partnerships. While trade volumes with

34 Information from the Confederation générale des entreprises de Côte d'Ivoire.

France have increased progressively (EUR35 1.3 billion in 2011 [\$1.45 billion], EUR 1.5 billion in 2012 [\$1.67 billion] and EUR 1.7 billion in 2013 [\$1.89 billion]), the balance of trade in the country's favour has decreased (as with most African countries).³⁶ At the same time, US and Asian companies, which are less risk adverse and view Côte d'Ivoire as increasingly stable, have been investing in the country and creating wealth.

Côte d'Ivoire has no enemies as such in Africa or the world. It is making use of its geographical position and economic power to play a key role in West Africa.

The country's regional diplomacy is being reinvented and adapted in the interests of the country's own stability through its promoting political dialogue and integrating public policies at the regional level; and defending its interests, influencing its partners, discouraging potential threats and developing its political influence in its immediate geopolitical context (ECOWAS, Africa, the Francophonie) and beyond.

One of Côte d'Ivoire's key goals is reassuming a leading role in the West African diplomatic and economic context. This is being achieved by, among others, the return of the African Development Bank to its historical headquarters in Abidjan and the probable future establishment in the capital of the operational centre for the West African branch of the US Africa Command.

Furthermore, after the lifting of the arms embargo by the UN Security Council the country launched its campaign for election as a non-permanent member of the council for 2018–2019. The country has served two previous terms, in 1964–1965 and 1990–1991.

CONCLUSION

In the regional context, Côte d'Ivoire's diplomatic apparatus has several advantages: the country's geographic centrality in West Africa (although this can be a disadvantage at times); its economic power; the symbolic legacy of Houphouët-Boigny; and the strategic alliances it has nurtured both within Africa and globally. These benefits are allowing it to once again play a leading role in the region by initiating and implementing mechanisms aimed at ensuring regional peace and security as well as economic development.

However, faced with governance and development challenges in West Africa, the member states of ECOWAS have implemented several policies that are failing to improve the quality of life of its citizens, even though progress has been made. Côte d'Ivoire is at the mercy of regional problems of stability, conflict and growth and is subject to various structural and contextual risks being the main receiving state for intra-regional migrants, who account for 90% of migrants from the region as opposed to only 5% leaving for

35 Currency code for the EU's euro.

36 Information from the Confederation générale des entreprises de Côte d'Ivoire.

the US and 5% leaving for Europe.³⁷ The projected doubling between 2015 and 2020 of the population in this geo-economic region and the consolidation of economic growth present both opportunities and risks. Other problems that have also emerged are religious fundamentalism, cross-border organised crime, piracy and drug trafficking.

Côte d'Ivoire remains the motor of UEMOA and a key player in ECOWAS, and will continue to exercise a leadership role in the region provided it can overcome its own weaknesses by improving its political governance and security, limiting social inequality, and making its diplomacy more effective, that is to say proactive and inclined towards inter-ministerial co-operation and specialisation.

37 OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), 'Permanent immigrant inflows', <http://data.oecd.org/fr/migration/entrees-d-immigres-permanents.htm> accessed 16 October 2016.

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